

American Flag Rank Officers of Chinese Ancestry

By Major General Bill Chen, U.S. Army Retired

Introduction

May marks the celebration of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month, a time to celebrate the impact AAPI's have made to our great country. AAPI's have contributed and distinguished themselves in all walks of life, including the U.S. Armed Services.

This article addresses a subset of AAPI's -- Americans of Chinese ancestry, hereafter referred to as Chinese Americans -- and:

- Provides an account of the first Americans of Chinese ancestry who have attained general and admiral rank, to include the first to attain 3-star rank
- Highlights the accomplishments of those who have achieved 2-star rank, and
- Lists those who attained one-star rank

Also, the purpose of this article is to convey, particularly to our younger generation, that there is a history and legacy of distinguished services by Americans of Chinese descent who have achieved flag rank (generals and admirals) in the U.S. Armed Services. It shouldn't be a surprise to see that some names are not obviously Chinese, but the individuals indeed have some Chinese ancestry. A key source of information was a list of Asian Pacific American Generals and Admirals compiled by the Japanese American Veterans Association. Biographical information on the flag rank officers was predominately obtained from military biographical data in the public domain.

While this article focuses on those who achieved flag rank, we must not forget that the vast majority of Chinese Americans who served in World War II were enlisted soldiers, sailors, marines, and airmen along with junior grade and some field grade officers. Many were drafted or volunteered to serve at a time when the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was still in-place. Passage of the Senate Bill S. 1050 and House Bill H.R. 2358 in the current 115th session of Congress for award of the Congressional Gold Medal to Chinese American veterans of World War II would be overdue recognition for these Chinese American veterans. These World War II Chinese American veterans paved the way for future generations by demonstrating their skills, competencies, loyalty, and patriotism and helping to open up opportunities for all Asian Americans to be a part of Mainstream America post-World War II.

First AAPI Flag Rank Officers of Chinese Ancestry

The first AAPI flag rank officers of Chinese ancestry in the:

- U.S. Army was Brigadier General Albert Lyman, followed by his younger brother, Charles B. Lyman
- U.S. Navy was Rear Admiral Gordon Pai'ea Chung-Hoon

- U.S. Air Force was Major General Dewey K.K. Lowe

Based on best available information, to date, no AAPI officer with Chinese ancestry has attained the rank of general officer in the U.S. Marine Corps.

Brigadier General Albert Kualii Brickwood Lyman, U.S. Army (Retired)



BG A. Lyman

The first AAPI to achieve the rank of general or admiral in the U.S. Armed Services was Brigadier General Albert Lyman, Corps of Engineers, a Class of 1909 graduate of the U.S. Military Academy. His mother was Rebecca Hualani Ahung of Chinese and Hawaii descent. Thus, Albert Lyman also qualifies as the first American of Chinese and Hawaiian origin to be promoted to general. In today's practices, an individual's national origin would be an individual statement of preference. He could classify himself as Caucasian, Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, Chinese, or a mix of the above. He had postings in Panama, France, Cuba, Philippines, the U.S., and Hawaii. During World War II, he headed all engineer operations within the Hawaiian Department. He was promoted to brigadier general on Aug. 11, 1942, but died two days later.

Brigadier General Charles B. Lyman, U.S. Army (Retired)

Charles Lyman, younger brother of Albert, graduated from the U.S. Military Academy in 1913. He had assignments in nine states and overseas in Australia, New Guinea, and the Philippines. He also achieved the rank of brigadier general, becoming the second AAPI to be a general officer. He was promoted to brigadier general in 1944 and served as the Commanding General of the 32d Infantry Division in the Leyte Campaign. In 1946, following his retirement, he moved to Chester, Pa., where he started what is now Maui Meadow Farm, Pennsylvania's oldest working Thoroughbred farm in Pa. He died in April 1981.

Rear Admiral Gordon Pai'ea Chung-Hoon, U.S. Navy (Retired)



RADM G. Chung-Hoon

Gordon Pai'ea Chung-Hoon was of Chinese-English-Hawaiian origin and was the first AAPI graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy, Class of 1934. He was the recipient of the Navy Cross and Silver Star for conspicuous gallantry and extraordinary heroism as commanding officer of the USS Sigsbee from May 1944 to October 1945. During the Korean War, he commanded the USS John W. Thomason. He retired in October 1959 as a rear admiral, the first AAPI admiral

in the U.S. Navy. The Guided Missile Destroyer USS Chung-Hoon was christened in 2003 in his honor. Clearly, Chung-Hoon was a leader and warfighter who established firsts: first AAPI to graduate from the U.S. Naval Academy, be promoted to admiral rank, and have a ship named for him. He also made his mark early on as a halfback and punter on the Navy football team. Upon his retirement, he served as the director of the Hawaiian Department of Agriculture. He died in July 1979.

Major General Dewey K.K. Lowe, U.S. Air Force (Retired)



Maj Gen D. Lowe

Dewey Lowe, a command pilot, is the first Chinese American promoted to general officer in the U.S. Air Force. He received his pilot's wings in February 1944 from the U.S. Army Air Forces aviation cadet program. During World War II, he was a pilot in the China-Burma-India Theater and later served during the Korean War and in Vietnam. He received a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of California at Berkeley in 1949 and a juris prudence degree from the University of San Francisco Law School in 1952. In addition to his assignments as an operational pilot, he held positions in contract administration and procurement. He served as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Procurement and Production at Air Force Logistics Command and Director of Procurement at Headquarters, U.S. Air Force. Promoted to major general on Sept. 1, 1976, he served as Director of Contracting and Acquisition policy, Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Research, Development, and Acquisition. He commanded the Sacramento Air Logistics Center prior to his retirement. He passed away in March 1994.

First AAPI 3-Star Flag Rank Officer of Hawaiian Ancestry

Lieutenant General Joseph F. Peterson, U.S. Army (Retired)



LTG J. Peterson

Joe Peterson was the first U.S. Army lieutenant general (three-star) of Hawaiian ancestry and is included here because he is also of Japanese and Chinese ancestry. He received a bachelor's degree in Economics from Santa Clara University in 1972 and an MBA from Chaminade University of Honolulu in 1980. He served in a variety of command and staff positions to include Commanding General, 1st Cavalry Division, Commanding General 3rd Infantry

Division, vice director for operations of The Joint Staff, and Commanding General, Civilian Police Assistance Training Team, Baghdad, Iraq. Following this service in Iraq, he served as the Deputy Commanding General, U.S. Forces Command. He retired from active duty in 2010 and now is a consultant to the Ministry of Defense of the United Arab Emirates.

American 2-Star Flag Rank Officers of Chinese Ancestry

Chinese Americans have made 2-star flag rank in the active and reserve components of the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force.

Major General Joseph Carvalho, Jr., U.S. Army (Retired)

Joe Carvalho is a physician and Medical Corps officer who has held specialized staff medical positions, served in operations at hospitals, and commanded major installations across the U.S. as well as operations in actions overseas. Of Puerto Rican and Chinese descent, he graduated from Gonzaga University in 1979. He completed his medical degree at the Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences School of Medicine in 1983. Key assignments held were: Chief of Cardiology, Tripler Army Hospital; Deputy Chief of Staff, Surgeon, U.S. Army Special Operations Command; and Assistant Chief of Staff, Health Affairs, XVIII Airborne Corps; 28th Combat Support Hospital and 44th Medical Command (Provisional). He has commanded the Great Plains, Southern, and Northern Regional Medical Commands, and the U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command. He served as Deputy Surgeon General and Deputy Commanding General (Support), U.S. Army Medical Command. In December 2015, he was appointed and served two years as the Joint Staff Surgeon, the chief medical advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Upon retirement, he joined The Henry M. Jackson Foundation for the Advancement of Military Medicine, Inc. as president and CEO.

Major General Lie Ping Chang, U.S. Army (Retired)

L.P. is a physician and Medical Corps officer who retired from the U.S. Army Reserve after 31 years of military service. He deployed with 322nd General Hospital to Germany for the Reforger Exercise in 1984 and was mobilized for Operation Desert Shield/Desert Storm in 1991-92. He transformed the 807th MEDCOM to the 807th Medical Command (Deployment & Support), a newly designated U.S. Army Theater Medical Command aligned to U.S. Army – South to provide medical support for U.S. Southern Command. During his tenure, he mobilized and deployed 65 units and approximately 2500 soldiers in support of overseas contingency operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Qatar, and Central America. His education includes a BA degree in biology from the Catholic University of America in 1976 and a doctor of osteopathic medicine degree from Kirksville College in 1980, a master of public health degree from Loma Linda University in 1993, and master's degree in Strategic Studies from the Army War College in 2001. Since 1982, he's been a Fellow and board certified family physician practicing in Alexandria, Va.

Rear Admiral Ming Er Chang, U.S. Navy (Retired)

In 1980 Ming Chang became the first naturalized Asian American naval officer to reach flag rank. A graduate of William and Mary and the Naval Postgraduate School, Chang served on active duty for 34 years. He served as the Commanding Officer of the USS Rathburne (DE 1057), USS Reeves (CG-24); Chief of Staff, Carrier Group THREE; Chief of Staff, Commander THIRD Fleet; and Commander Cruiser Destroyer Group TWO. As a rear admiral, he served as Deputy Commander, Weapons and Combat Systems, Naval Sea Systems Command. He culminated his career serving as Department of the Navy Inspector General. Upon his retirement from the Navy, he became vice president and corporate director of the Pacific Region at Raytheon International. He passed away in October 2017.

Major General William S. Chen, U.S. Army (Retired)

Bill Chen is an Army Acquisition Corps officer and has had assignments in the operational aspects, R&D, project management, and acquisition management of missile, air defense, and missile defense systems. He received a bachelor's degree in engineering mathematics in 1960 and a master's degree in aeronautical & astronautical engineering in 1961, both from the University of Michigan; and an MBA from Auburn University in 1970. He was the Army project manager on two major air defense programs and served in the Office of the Chief of Staff, Army and Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Research, Development and Acquisition, Department of Army. He had overseas assignments in Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos and has commanded a battalion. As a brigadier general, he was the Deputy Director of Weapons Systems and Assistant Deputy for Systems Management at Department of Army. Promoted to major general in 1989, he served as Commanding General, U.S. Army Missile Command and later as the Program Executive Officer for Missile Defense. After retirement from the Army in 1993 with 32 years of active military service, he worked for United Defense, Inc. in successive positions as vice president & program director, vice president Army Programs, and vice president engineering & product development, and for BAE Systems, Inc. as vice president & general manager.

Major General Clarence K.K. Chinn, U.S. Army (Retired)

KK Chinn is an Infantry officer and served in a variety of command and staff positions in Airborne, Air Assault, Light Infantry, and Ranger units. He is a 1981 graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point and received a master's degree in Strategic Studies from the Army War College in 2002. Key positions held were: Chief of Staff, 82nd Airborne Division, Chief of Staff for the International Security Assistance Force Joint Command (Provisional), Deputy Commanding General (Support) CJTF-82 in Afghanistan and Deputy Commanding General (Support) for the 82nd Airborne Division. Other assignments included Commanding General Joint Readiness Training Center and Fort Polk, Deputy Commanding General CJTF-101 in Afghanistan, and Deputy Commanding General, U.S. Army Special Operations Command. As a

major general, Chinn was the Commanding General, U.S. Army – South at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. He retired in October 2017.

Rear Admiral Colin G. Chinn, U.S. Navy

Colin Chinn is a doctor and in the Medical Corps of the U.S. Navy. Armed with public health and epidemiology degrees (bachelor and master's, respectively) from Johns Hopkins University, he attended the Medical College of Virginia through the Armed Forces Health Professions Scholarship Program and earned a Doctor of Medicine in 1985. Chinn is a Fleet Marine Force qualified officer. Assignments include director of Tricare Region West/Pacific, United States Pacific Command surgeon, and Acting Deputy Director, Defense Health Agency. Currently he is the Joint Staff surgeon at the Pentagon and serves as chief medical advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Major General Vernon Chong, U.S. Air Force (Retired)

Vernon Chong received a doctor of medicine degree in 1958 from Stanford University School of Medicine and entered the Air Force in 1963. Chong has successively held top surgeon positions in the Air Force and in a combatant command. He is rated as a Chief Flight Surgeon. He has commanded three Air Force medical centers, served as command surgeon of major air commands, was Commander of the Joint Military Medical Command, San Antonio, and was the command surgeon at Headquarters, European Command. He was promoted to major general in 1987.

Major General John Liu Fugh, U.S. Army (Retired)

John Fugh is a Judge Advocate General Corps officer -- the first naturalized Chinese American to be a brigadier general in the U.S. Army. He served in progressively responsible positions as a staff judge advocate and has had overseas assignments in Taiwan, Germany, and Vietnam. Promoted to brigadier general in 1984, he served as the assistant judge advocate general for civil law. He was promoted to major general and served as the 33rd Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Army, 1991 - 1993. He graduated from Georgetown University with a bachelor's degree in international relations and George Washington Law School with a juris doctor degree. After retiring from the Army, Fugh joined a law firm and later worked for McDonnell-Douglas and Boeing in China, and also Enron International in China. He passed away in May 2010.

Major General Calvin K. Lau, U.S. Army (Retired)

Kelly Lau received bachelor and master's degrees in secondary education from the University of Hawaii. He served nearly 33 years in the U.S. Army Reserve. He has had assignments as Commander of the Pacific Army Liaison Command, Liaison Officer for the U.S. Army Western Command to the Hawaiian Army National Guard, Commander, IX Corps, and Deputy Commanding General for the U.S. Army Pacific from 1994 – 1998. In his civilian career, Lau worked for the Department of Navy as Information Technology Resource Manager, Head of Systems Programming, and Department Head for Systems Management and Engineering. Lau retired from the Army in June 1999.

Major General Carol A. Lee, U.S. Air Force (Retired)

Carol Lee was commissioned through the Air Force Reserve Health Professions Scholarship Program in May 1975. She graduated with a B.A. in biology from Cornell University in 1975 and medical degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1979. She also completed a gastroenterology fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania in 1983. Rated as Senior flight surgeon, her key assignments included: Commander, 940th Aerospace Medicine Squadron, mobilization assistant to the Assistant Surgeon General for Medical Force Development/Nursing Services, Deputy Joint Staff Surgeon and Director, Joint Reserve Medical Readiness Operations and Affairs, Special Staff to the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. Her last assignment in the U.S. Air Force Reserve was mobilization assistant to the Surgeon General of the U.S. Air Force. She retired in April 2013.

Major General Robert G.F. Lee, U.S. Army (Retired)

Bob Lee held a variety of command and staff positions in the 100th Battalion, 442nd Infantry, U.S. Army Reserve, to include battalion command. Other key assignments include: Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations and Training (G-3), IX Corps (Reinforcement), Chief of Staff, 9th Army Reserve Command, and Commanding General, 9th Regional Support Command prior to his appointment as the Adjutant General, State of Hawaii, on January 1, 2003 and served until January 8, 2011. He graduated from the University of Hawaii with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in 1971 and an MBA in 1983. His civilian career includes 27 years of service overhauling nuclear submarines at Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard, culminating in his assignment as Superintendent of Nuclear Regional Maintenance for the Pacific nuclear fleet. He also served as Pacific General Manager, Perot Systems Government Services/ADI Technology.

Major General Alexis T. Lum, U.S. Army (Retired)

Alex Lum was commissioned a second lieutenant in 1950 and served as an infantry platoon leader in the Korean War. He earned a degree in civil engineering in 1950 from the University of Hawaii. He joined the Army National Guard in 1953 and served in Vietnam when the 29th Brigade was activated in 1968. He served as Adjutant General under two Hawaii governors. For 15 years, Lum served as the special assistant on military affairs to U.S. Senator Daniel K. Inouye. He died in August 2009.

Major General Stephen D. Tom, U.S. Army (Retired)

Stephen Tom received a bachelor's of art degree from the University of Michigan in 1971 and a juris doctor degree from Boston University in 1974. He served in a variety of U.S. Army Reserve assignments in IX Corps (Reinf)/9th Army Reserve Command/9th Regional Support Command. He commanded the 322d Civil Affairs Brigade and served as the Assistant Chief of Staff G5 (Wartime), Eighth U.S. Army, Yongsan, Korea. As a major general, he assumed duties as Deputy Commanding General for Mobilization and Reserve Affairs for U.S. Army Pacific in August 2003. He then served as Chief of Staff for U.S. Pacific Command and subsequently as Commander, Joint POW and MIA

Command until his retirement in 2012. In his civilian capacity, he is an attorney in the practice of law and is a partner in a law firm.

Major General Darryll D.M. Wong, U.S. Air Force (Retired)

Darryll Wong is a Command Pilot and Instructor Pilot. While on active duty, he flew C-141's during the final years of the Vietnam War. He received a BA degree in geography in 1972 and an MBA in 2009, both from the University of Hawaii. He served as the Director of Operations, 203rd Air Refueling Squadron and Director of Operations, Hawaii Air National Guard. He served as the Commander, Hawaii Air National Guard and succeeded Bob Lee as Adjutant General, Hawaii in 2011. He retired in 2014.

Major General M. Ted Wong, U.S. Army (Retired)

Ted Wong is a dentist and Dental Corps officer and has had a variety of clinical, staff, and command assignments. He graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1980 and graduated from the University of California, San Francisco School of Dentistry in 1984. He obtained a master's degree in health care administration from Baylor University in 1998 and a master's degree in Strategic Studies from the Army War College in 2003. His key assignments included: Command of the North Atlantic Regional Dental Command and Walter Reed Dental Activity, the U.S. Army Dental Command, Deputy Commanding General for Readiness, Western Regional Medical Command and the Commanding General William Beaumont Army Medical Center, the Southern Regional Medical Command, and the Northern Regional Medical Command. He was the twenty-sixth Chief of the Army Dental Corps and retired in 2014. Upon his Army retirement, he joined UnitedHealth Group and is Chief Dental Officer, United HealthCare.

Major General Garrett S. Yee, U.S. Army

Garrett Yee has held a variety of command and staff positions. He has a bachelor's degree in combined science, MBA from Golden State University, and master's in Strategic Studies, Army War College. As a brigadier general he served as the Deputy Commander for Mobilization, Surface Deployment and Distribution Command. Promoted to major general, he is the Army lead for network modernization and the Military Deputy, Cybersecurity Directorate in the Office of the Army Chief Information Officer, G6. He previously served as the Commander, 335th Signal Command; G6, U.S. Army Central; CJ6 Coalition Joint Forces Land Component Command; and Director, Cyber Information Systems for Combined Joint Task Force – Operation Inherent Resolve.

Rear Admiral Jonathan A. Yuen, U.S. Navy

Jonathan Yuen is a Supply Corps officer and has had numerous sea and shore duty assignments in supply and logistics support. He graduated with distinction from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1983. While a midshipman, he attended the U.S. Military Academy at West Point as an exchange student in the fall of 1981. He has a Master of Business Administration from The Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania. He has earned supply warfare qualifications in submarine, aviation, and surface warfare. Joint assignments

include serving as deputy commander/chief of staff of the Joint Contracting Command, Iraq/Afghanistan and director, U.S. Central Command Deployment and Distribution Operations Center in Kuwait. Yuen became commander, Naval Supply Systems Command and 47th Chief of Supply Corps on October 3, 2013.

Brigadier General (P) Suzanne P. Vares-Lum

Suzanne P. Vares-Lum is the Mobilization Assistant to the Director of Strategic Plans and Policy, U.S. Pacific Command at Camp Smith, Hawaii. She received a BA degree in journalism in 1989 and master of education in teaching in 1996, both from the University of Hawaii. She is also a graduate of the U.S. Army War College and earned a master's degree in Strategic Studies in 2011. She served on active duty in various military intelligence assignments, 1989 to 1993 and then joined the 29th Separate Infantry Brigade, Hawaii National Guard. She was mobilized in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom III from August 2004 to March 2006 and led the Joint Intelligence Center in Balad, Iraq. Prior to her current assignment, she served as the Chief of the Joint Staff, Hawaii National Guard.

American 1-star Flag Rank Officers of Chinese Ancestry

- U.S. Army: John Fugan, Mark Toy, Frederick G. Wong (Ret)
- U.S. Army Reserve: Jon D. Lee (Ret), John Y.H. Ma (Ret), Coral Wong Pietsch (Ret),
- Army National Guard: John Gong, Gary Ishikawa, Bernard Watson, James P. Wong
- U.S. Navy Reserve: Mark Fung, Alma M. Grocki
- U.S. Air Force Reserve: Robert Chu
- Air National Guard: Jeannette Young

Comments & Observations

Promotion to flag rank is the outcome of a highly competitive process. It is highly competitive to attain one-star rank and roughly only half of the one-stars attain two-star rank. It is even tougher to get to three-star and four-star rank up the hierarchical pyramid.

To date, 37 Americans of Chinese ancestry have attained flag rank in the active and reserve components. As generals and admirals, they have served as commanders, leaders, managers, and in high-level Service and Joint Staff positions.

Of this 37, LTG J. Peterson was the first U.S. Army lieutenant general of Hawaiian ancestry; also of Chinese ancestry. He clearly distinguished himself as a commander at all levels up through division command and also focused on the training and caring of troops and their families. In his last assignment he oversaw the deployment of almost a million troops to Afghanistan and Iraq.

19 of the 37 attained two-star flag rank. 11 of the 19 (5 Army, 4 Navy, and 2 Air Force) two-star generals and admirals served a full career in the active

component. One of the brigadier generals (Suzanne P. Vares-Lum) is on the promotion list to 2-star rank.

- Most of the 11 2-stars have commanded two-star commands in their respective fields.
- Four of the 11 were in “specialty” branches: Medical (MG J. Carvalho, RADM C. Chinn), Dental (MG T. Wong), and Judge Advocate General Corps (MG J. Fugh). Two reached the top of their corps -- MG J. Fugh was the Army’s 33rd Judge Advocate General and MG T. Wong was the Army’s 26th Chief Army Dental Corps.
- Of the remaining seven, four were “warfighters”: MG C. Chinn, RADM Chung-Hoon, RADM M. Chang, and Maj. Gen. D. Lowe. The others were in weapons systems acquisition (MG B. Chen), medical (RADM C. Chinn), and logistics (RADM J. Yuen). RADM J. Yuen is the Navy’s 47th Chief of Supply Corps.
- Of special note is that MG C. Chinn is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy and RADM’s Chung-Hoon and J. Yuen are graduates of the U.S. Naval Academy.

The eight who attained two-star rank in the reserve components also achieved distinction:

- Three (MG’s A. Lum and B. Lee and Maj. Gen. D. Wong) served as State Adjutant General of Hawaii. All three are University of Hawaii graduates, as is MG K. Lau, BG (P) S. Vares-Lum, and BG J. Ma, and G. Ishikawa. Thus, kudos to the University of Hawaii and its ROTC program.
- Two served in prominent positions as Deputy Commanding General U.S. Army Pacific (MG K. Lau) and Chief of Staff Pacific Command (MG S. Tom).
- Two were physicians (MG L.P. Chang, Maj. Gen. C. Lee) and one on the Army Staff, Office of the Chief Information Officer G-6 (MG G. Yee).

We should acknowledge the accomplishments of the listed American generals and admirals of Chinese ancestry. We should also note that after military retirement, these generals and admirals continued to serve in responsible positions in civilian life.

There also is that which we have not yet seen. No Chinese American has yet to be promoted to general officer rank in the U.S. Marine Corps. No Chinese American graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy has yet to be promoted to general officer. Also, a snap shot today shows no active component Chinese American 2-star generals are currently serving in the U.S. Army or Air Force compared to previous periods.

It is not the intention of this article to analyze or rationalize the basis of these outcomes – the career aspirations and professional development of military officers is a complex process with a long gestation period. It even starts at the family level relative to early influences and whether parents would encourage or discourage their young sons and daughters toward a military career.

The promotion system in the military is merit-based. For promotion to one- and two-stars, promotion boards convened by the respective Service Secretaries develop a list of recommended officers for promotion. The promotion list is approved by the Service Secretaries and forwarded through the Secretary of Defense to the President, who then sends the nominations to the Senate for confirmation. Promotions to three-star rank are based upon appointments made by the Chiefs of the Services. These appointments are approved by the Service Secretaries and the Secretary of Defense, and are then forwarded to the President for nomination to the Senate.

Most of the three-star billets across the Services are in combatant commands. There are also three-star billets in functional areas, such as personnel, intelligence, acquisition, and logistics. But, there are fewer billets in these areas compared to three-star billets in operations, plans, and strategy. Accordingly, promotion to the three-star level is predominately based on successful command of operational and warfighting units at the two-star level and the demonstrated potential to serve at the three-star level. Toward this end, for Chinese American officers to be more competitive for three-star appointments, more Chinese Americans should pursue command assignments in operational and warfighting units and staff assignments in operations, plans, and strategy.

Like in other occupations in the business, government, and even in academia -- the filling of top, critical positions can depend on good fortune, timing, and being at the right place at the right time, and knowing and working for the right bosses. Other factors come into play, such as reputation, being widely known and respected by peers and superiors in an individual's profession.

We applaud and are proud of this legacy established by the Americans of Chinese ancestry in achieving flag rank. Those pursuing a military career should continue to further this Legacy of Progress.

Younger generations should be encouraged to pursue a military career where there is dedicated interest in Service to our Country and in leading and taking care of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines.



MG Bill Chen, U.S. Army Retired is a third generation Chinese American. His father was a captain and pilot in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II assigned to the 14th Air Force (Flying Tigers) under Gen. Claire Chennault in the China-Burma-India Theater. The writer wishes to acknowledge Terry Shima and MG Tony Taguba, U.S. Army Retired, Japanese American Veterans Association, for compiling the Asian Pacific American Generals and Admirals List; and retired MG's Bob Lee and Ted Wong for assistance in updates and biographical data.